

Chester Board of Fire Commissioners
Minutes, April 21, 2021
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The Chester Board of Fire Commissioners held the regular monthly meeting via GoToMeeting on Wednesday, April 21, 2021 at the Fire House, 6 High Street, Chester, Connecticut. In attendance were Bob Bandzes, John Divis, Bob Quale, Rick Schreiber and Bettie Perreault. Ex-officio members present was Selectman Charlene Janecek, Chief James Grzybowski, Fire Marshal Dick Leighton, and Assistant Chief Charles Greeney.

Item 1: Call to Order

Chairman Bettie Perreault called the meeting to order at 7:30 P.M. followed by roll call of those present.

Item 2: Audience of Citizens – there was no audience of citizens.

Item 3. Update –

Main Street Project: Remedial work on the Chester wall and flagpole-surrounding wall to address aesthetics associated with the Main Street Project will be done in the next several weeks. Shoreline Landscaping of Clinton will perform the work.

Item 4. Report on Current Events

Chief Grzybowski advised inspection and review of private bridges would be done with notification to property owners advising of limitations for passage by emergency and other vehicles. Notice will be posted on bridges advising of restrictions as appropriate.

Construction activities for 43, 45 and 47 Main Street will require parking for dumpster, equipment and other vehicles occupying several parking spaces to be committed during construction activities for several months. Contractors associated with the project will also utilize public parking lots. Construction activities will provide the structure with a number of firebreaks, both internally and externally. Potential uses and occupancies of the numerous individual units within the structure were noted.

Item 5. Report of Board of Selectmen

Selectman Janecek advised the Public Hearing for the proposed 2021-2022 Budget will be held April 29; the Referendum on the proposed Education budget will be held on May 4, and the Town Meeting to approve the annual budget will be held on May 19. Meetings will be held virtually until the Governor's Executive Orders have been released, with in-person meetings located to provide sufficient space to address pandemic safety recommendations.

The Chester Fair Association has elected to hold the traditional fair this August, with measures in place to avoid long lines, use of one-way pedestrian traffic as much as possible, and other ways to provide an experience with limited pandemic exposure.

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Item 6. Report of Fire Chief

The March activity report showing 54 incidents responded to was distributed. Mutual aid received and provided was also detailed and discussed, with note that mutual aid response times are affected when other departments have already been committed to another response.

Chief Grzybowski reported meetings and drills resumed in-person in April. The Juniors will be allowed to join in-person activities in May. The Easter Egg Hunt was “a huge success” this year with participants observing pandemic safety measures. A food drive by all area fire departments to benefit the Shoreline Soup Kitchen will be held Saturday, April 24. The Brush Truck will return to service early in May once final tasks for installation of equipment are completed, and will again be available for training. A Scott air pack and bottle has been received; the unit was provided by a \$10,000 grant from Shipman’s Fire Equipment Company. The Department has secured supplies available through FEMA’s COVID supplemental funding. Department members are completing installation of a three-bunk facility for use by responders and other personnel to provide an on-site location for rest or sleep during prolonged emergency activities or events.

Chief Grzybowski provided information associated with a March working fire with a fatality, reviewing response time, Department personnel responses, the multi-town mutual aid provided, as well as other details. Members complimented the officers and responders, with thanks and appreciation for all the mutual aid responders who assisted in a very difficult situation.

Item 7: Report of Fire Marshal

Fire Marshal Dick Leighton distributed the activity report for March 2021, noting the reporting associated with the working fire/fatality event is on-going and requiring significant time to perform.

Item 8: Financial Reports

- (a) 2020-2021 Fire Department Budget: Chief Grzybowski reviewed the current budget, noting that vehicle inspections, and hose and ladder testing are still to be performed. While a few items may require minor over-expenditures, line item transfers will allow the Department to end the fiscal year within budget. Ambulance income for March increased, reflected increased activity.
- (b) 2020-2021 Fire Marshal Budget: Fire Marshal Leighton advised because of the additional required reporting and associated activities in connection with the fire and fatality in March, request has been made for approval of an additional \$5,000 to cover costs through the end of the current fiscal year.

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(c) 2021-2022 Fire Department Budget – Proposed: the Board of Finance has approved the requested operating budget for the Department as submitted. The Capital request was approved as submitted following removal of the parking lot request.

(d) 2021-2022 Fire Marshal Budget – Proposed: There have been no changes from what was submitted.

Item 9. Old Business – there was nothing to bring up.

Item 10. Approval of Minutes of March 17, 2021

On motion by Rick Schreiber, seconded by Bob Bandzes, the minutes of the March 17, 2021 meeting were approved, with Bob Quale abstaining.

Item 11. Report and Status of Events: There was nothing additional to report.

Item 12. New Business:

Bob Quale recommended establishment of a detailed inventory of Department equipment and supplies, maintained in spreadsheet format, to provide Department officers and Town personnel accurate information of what is available, what should be maintained, associated costs and other details to assist with budgeting, planning and to ensure needed items are available when needed. Chief Grzybowski reported the Town already maintains an inventory of items costing more than \$2,500. Detail of additional items may a project for Junior members to undertake.

It was noted that security cameras have been installed throughout the Fire House, providing record of activities and will be monitored by select officers and personnel. Notification will be made that the cameras are activated and recording. Access control of Fire House doors will be the next security measure to be undertaken.

Item 13. Correspondence: There was none.

Item 14. From Members or Guests: In an extended Q&A exchange, members and officers spoke of a number of matters, including the following:

- Ambulance personnel: paid personnel are all part-time Town employees who work on flexible schedules to accommodate schooling and other commitments. There are still time slots that need to be filled, with one additional person to be provided in the 2021-2022 budget once it is approved. Additional members are currently taking classes. All departments are facing a similar shortage of available, qualified personnel. While Chester's pay scale is competitive, finding and securing good personnel is challenging. Pay-per-call volunteers may respond to an increased stipend.

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- The Department continues to attract new members despite the challenges of the COVID pandemic, with potential new members being interviewed at monthly meetings. The Department is so well regarded that one recent out-of-town member has joined because he “prefers to be here” – a high compliment to the officers and members of the Hose Company.
- Membership of Juniors has steadily increased, with enthusiasm and commitment. Members are now working to achieve the maximum membership of 15 Juniors. Two members are signed up to attend this year’s summer Fire Academy training.
- Asked how the Department addresses personnel response following a critical incident, Chief Grzybowski and Deputy Chief Greeney reported members are supportive of each other, critical stress debriefing is available with careful and thorough monitoring during and after incidents, with a psychologist on standby if needed. All agreed Department cooperation and interaction is a coordinated team, providing support to all during times of such critical stress.
- The after-event briefing provided by Fire Marshal Leighton in connection with the working fire/fatality gave all members an opportunity to know what steps and actions are required following such an incident. Attendance and participation was well attended.

Item 15. Adjournment

Motion by Rick Schreiber, seconded by John Divis, to adjourn at 8:29 P.M. Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Bettie Perreault, Chairman